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04/11/24 BIG FOOD

Lunchables Found to Contain Relatively High Lead Levels + More

The Defender's Big Food NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to industrial food companies and their products, including ultra-processed foods, food additives, contaminants, GMOs and lab-grown meat and their toxic effects on human health. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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Lunchables Found to Contain Relatively High Lead Levels

The Hill reported:

The popular kids snack [Lunchables](#) contains relatively high levels of [lead](#) and sodium, a consumer watchdog group warned Tuesday. Consumer Reports (CR), a consumer advocacy group, [said it tested](#) 12 store-bought versions of Lunchables — which are made by [Kraft Heinz](#) — along with similar lunch and snack kits and found “relatively high levels of lead and cadmium” in the Lunchables kits.

Cadmium is a chemical element linked to negative effects on the kidney and the skeletal and respiratory systems and is classified as a human carcinogen, [according to the World Health Organization](#). There is not a safe level of lead for children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes.

All but one of the kits contained harmful [phthalates](#) — chemicals found in plastic that can be linked to reproductive issues, diabetes and some cancers.

CR [started a petition](#) calling on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to remove the Lunchables food kits from the National School Lunch Program. The petition had more than 12,000 signatures as of Tuesday night.

Do We Really Want a Food Cartel?

The Atlantic reported:

The Federal Trade Commission has just released its long-anticipated [report](#) on the major disruptions to America's grocery supply chain during the [coronavirus](#) pandemic — and it confirmed the worst. According to the report, large grocery companies saw the pandemic as an opportunity. They deliberately wielded their market power amid food shortages, entrenching their dominance and keeping their shelves stocked even as smaller companies had to scramble for goods or simply close up shop.

For the [big players](#) in the grocery industry — companies such as Walmart — the pandemic was a boon. And profits have continued to climb, along with food prices, even as supply-chain disruptions have vanished.

Why did all of this happen? The FTC report implied an answer but did not state it outright: A handful of companies now control the food system of the United States, stifling competition in ways not seen since the great trusts and monopolies of the late 1890s.

The mergers and acquisitions of the past four decades have greatly reduced the number of companies — a fact hidden by the multiplicity of brands. Kroger, the nation's largest supermarket chain, runs grocery stores under more than two dozen names. That number would nearly double if its [announced merger](#) with Albertsons is allowed to proceed.

More Microplastics Are Showing Up in Our Food

Newsweek reported:

Some may have been dismayed, others horrified, or even disgusted. Scientists researching [microplastics](#), however, were unsurprised.

Recent [news from a study](#) led by Madeleine Milne with Ocean Conservancy and the University of Toronto showed that 90% of the items that they tested, items we find in our fridges and grocery stores — from burgers and steaks to chicken and even plant-based [foods](#) — contain those seemingly ubiquitous tiny particles of plastics, often referred to as microplastics.

Chicken nuggets. Plant-based burgers. Fish filets. None of our favorite freezer delicacies were spared. The inclusion of fish on this list of 16 types of protein tested, however, was the one that surprised me the least. For years now, we have been finding microplastics in fish and in freshwater more broadly.

A few years ago, a team of researchers found that Lake Winnipeg's plastics pollution problem was greater than or comparable to that of many of the [Laurentian Great Lakes](#), with further research showing the presence of microplastics in the stomachs of fish from the Red River. Those same researchers have also found microplastics in [fish tissues in the wild and in those sold fresh in supermarkets](#).

The more we look for microplastics, the more we find them — including in our food.

Bird Flu Pushes U.S. Dairy Farmers to Ban Visitors, Chop Trees

Reuters reported:

Dairy [farmers](#) in the United States are raising their defenses to try to contain the spread of bird flu: banning visitors, cutting down trees to discourage wild birds from landing, and disinfecting vehicles coming onto their land.

North Carolina on Wednesday became the seventh state to report an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a dairy herd, after the U.S. Department of Agriculture [confirmed infections](#) in Texas, Kansas, Ohio, Michigan, Idaho and New Mexico.

Reuters spoke to seven dairy farmers in five states who said they are reinforcing safety and cleaning procedures, with three producers exceeding government recommendations.

Even before North Carolina's outbreak, Jordan, 64, said she was limiting visitors who could unintentionally carry in contaminated bird droppings on boots or vehicles. She also started chopping down about 40 small trees to avoid attracting wild birds during spring migration.

The U.S. [Centers for Disease Control](#) and Prevention said the [risk to humans](#) remains low but has asked states for plans to test and treat potentially impacted farm workers.

Immunize Roundup's Maker From Liability? Stop Favoring Corporations Over Iowans.

Des Moines Register reported:

On April 2, the Iowa Senate passed [Senate File 2412](#), a bill that would grant immunity to [pesticide](#) companies from civil lawsuits related to damages caused by Environmental Protection Agency-approved pesticides. A bill with the same approach [is currently sitting in the House Ways and Means Committee](#) (after being notably rejected by the House Agriculture Committee), waiting to see if the industry can garner enough support to pass the legislation in both houses.

Major pesticide companies — namely [Bayer](#) (which produces Roundup with the active ingredient [glyphosate](#), after purchasing Monsanto in 2016) — have been [facing billions of dollars in lawsuits](#) annually regarding health damages that the plaintiffs claim are caused by exposure to their products. Their campaign in Iowa is part of a [larger multi-state lobbying effort](#) continuing to turn the judicial tide to protect industry over people. After all, some say it is cheaper to lobby politicians to change the rules than to fight court cases. But what does this mean for Iowa's [farmers](#) and for the state's future?

The argument that farmers are in support of this legislation is untrue. I testified as a representative of the Iowa Farmers Union, and I was confidently able to claim that we hadn't received any member support for this bill and that our organization supports the ability of our farmers to seek relief for pesticide injury.

It all started to make sense to me: Industry-driven farm and commodity groups represent their farmers on the issues that are easy (such as conservation and crop insurance), but this story presents a blatant instance where members were clearly left out and misrepresented in the face of challenging issues that involve corporate interests.

How Tennessee Officials Lost Out on Millions in Funding for Farmers and Food Banks

Civil Eats reported:

In December 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new program called [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement](#), or LFPA, which would ultimately direct \$900 million in American Rescue Plan funding to participating states, territories, and tribes, allowing them to purchase [food](#) from small farmers to distribute to food pantries and food bank clients.

As 2022 unfolded, 82 states, territories, and tribes signed on, ultimately receiving millions in LFPA funding to strengthen farm-to-family programs in their communities.

[Tennessee received \\$8.2 million](#) to allow the state's five Feeding America food banks to purchase more than 1 million pounds of food — beef, eggs, leafy greens, even rare items like apples and honey — to distribute among 300 partner organizations for families and individuals in need. All of it supported 115 small farmers, who could use the steady income to expand or solidify operations, hire extra help, and even pay down debt. Kelsey Keener, 36, who oversees a few thousand Novogen laying hens on his 300-acre [Sequatchie Cove Farm](#), called it “a prayer answered.”

But while Keener was grateful, he was also quietly skeptical. This is too good to be true, Keener thought to himself. And while he knew the grant was temporary, not permanent, he could never have imagined the way the funding would end in Tennessee.

Kentucky Losing Family Farms and Farmland at a Rapid Clip — at What Cost?

Cincinnati Enquirer reported:

From the front seat of his pickup, Ryan Bivens gazed past one of his fields, through the barren trees toward a horizon of white rooftops, and saw another harbinger for [farmers](#).

The construction site of a gargantuan electric vehicle battery plant in Glendale represents thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of public and private [investment in the electric vehicle industry](#). To Bivens, a first-generation corn, soybean and wheat farmer, it also represents “1,500 acres of prime farmland that will never be farmed again.”

Across Kentucky, farmland is vanishing under a blitz of concrete and asphalt. Farmland declined by half a million acres in Kentucky between 2017-2022, new U.S. Department of Agriculture data shows, as suburban sprawl and other forms of development have gobbled up crop fields, pasture and woodlands.

Some of Kentucky's woes are mirrored nationally. Between 2017-22, as the commonwealth lost about 520,000 acres of farmland, the U.S. lost more than 20 million acres — an area the size of Maine, once used for crops, pasture and grazing.

Can Maine Lead the Way to a Future without Forever Chemicals?

Mother Jones reported:

Dostie Farm, an organic dairy in Fairfield, Maine, was thriving until one day in October 2020 when owner [Egide Dostie Jr.](#) got a call from Stonyfield, his exclusive buyer. Something was off with the farm's milk: Tests had found that it contained three times the state's allowable level of perfluorooctanesulfonic acid, one of the class of “forever chemicals” known as PFAS.

“We called bullshit,” Dostie remembers. PFAS contamination had recently been found at two other Maine dairy farms. But those farms had used sewage sludge to fertilize their pastures — something Dostie had never done.

But, as Dostie later learned, his farm's previous owners, like many of their peers back in the 1980s and '90s, had spread the fields with sludge provided by a [state program](#) that promoted it as a safe, environmentally friendly fertilizer — and delivered it to [farmers](#) for free. At the time, few people realized that chemicals in the sludge would eventually taint water, soils, milk, vegetables, and even farmers' bodies.

Maine could finally force Washington to take broader action. The state has developed the country's first meaningful thresholds for the chemicals in some foods and soil, has banned the use of sludge as fertilizer, and will, by 2030, ban the sale of all products with intentionally added PFAS.

What Are the ‘Forever Chemicals’ Found in UK Supermarkets?

Yahoo!Life reported:

Toxins known as per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) [pesticides](#) or “forever chemicals” have been found to be widespread across British fruit and vegetable produce, according to a new report.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK analyzed the government's latest [residue testing](#) program results and found that there are at least 10 PFAS pesticides found across spices, fruits, and vegetables.

PFAS were found in supermarket [foods](#) such as spinach, tomatoes, grapes, and cherries, but strawberries were the worst offenders with 95% of the 120 samples of strawberries tested containing these pesticides.

A U.S. study earlier this year also found that teas, pork, sweets, sports drinks, processed meat, butter, crisps and bottled water were amongst the highest drivers of levels of “forever chemicals” in our diets,” Nutritionist at [Riverford](#), Hannah Neville-Green, says.

Europe's Farmers Are in Revolt and the Far Right Is Trying to Make Hay

The Washington Post reported:

The [farmers](#) standing with their arms crossed outside a sheep barn in rural Brittany were absolutely furious, completely en colère. For a visiting centrist politician, that made for an early, if not the best, start. It has provided an opening.

In recent months, angry agricultural workers have [rolled their tractors into Paris](#) and other cities across Europe, blocking roads, spraying manure and setting things on fire.

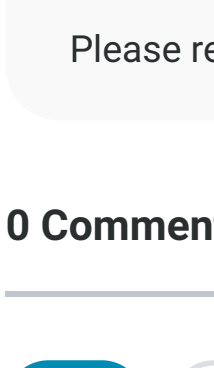
Farmers are mad about high costs and low prices, the prospect of free trade deals, the constraints of climate regulations, about what they say is a failure of political elites to understand what it means to grow wheat or raise sheep.

Their revolt is reshaping European policy — officials who previously promised to put the environment first and lead the world in a green transition have scrambled to walk back some of their own rules. And in a year of key elections in both Europe and the United States, the farmer uprising may foretell a sharp [right shift](#).

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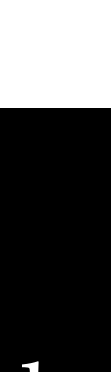
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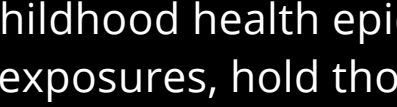
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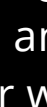
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